

Columnists

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Accurate Reports by CIA Go Unheeded



STATINTL

WASHINGTON—if we didn't know better, there would be reason to suspect the Central Intelligence Agency of being in back of the celebrated "leaks" that have stood Washington on its head in recent times, for each of the revelations has enhanced the reputation and standing of the CIA.

In that respect, the latest expose revolving around the disclosure of the so-called "Kissinger Papers," is no different from the famed "Pentagon Papers" of last year or the more recent "Anderson Papers." No matter how you slice these papers, the CIA comes out looking realistic and dependable, at least comparatively so.

Nixon Had Good Advice

It is possible to see now [thru the just-revealed Kissinger Papers] that President Nixon, like President Johnson, had good advice, much of it supplied by the CIA, as well as bad advice, and that both chief executives chose to listen to what they wanted to hear, which is why the war is still going on.

Soon after taking office in 1969, Nixon, thru his national security adviser, Henry Kissinger, initiated a review of the Viet Nam conflict. The results of the study, leaked to the press and Congress last week, showed the CIA was bearish on the war. On bombing, for example, it said:

"The air war did not seriously affect the flow of men and supplies to Communist forces in Laos and South Viet Nam. Nor did it significantly erode North Viet Nam's military defense capabilities or Hanoi's determination to persist in the war."

That was nearly four years ago, and still looks like sound advice today. Nixon, however, didn't want to believe it then and apparently can't reconcile himself to it even now. The U. S. Air Force is presently dropping more bombs in Viet Nam than ever before—and the enemy is still advancing.

As pointed out by Daniel Ellsberg, who leaked the Pentagon Papers, President Johnson was just as deaf to CIA assessments. Ellsberg showed that Johnson had not lacked accurate intelligence estimates from the CIA before he

make better decisions. If the President had this information available, why did he ignore it? Why did he listen to Walt Rostow and McGeorge Bundy as experts on Viet Nam instead of people who had a very good track record for prediction?"

The later Anderson Papers shed some light on Presidential decision-making. The official documents that were brought to light by columnist Jack Anderson center on the recent war between Pakistan and India. They showed the CIA once again providing a realistic estimate of the situation and a President once again choosing to ignore it. Nixon wanted Pakistan to win and ordered all hands to "tilt" against India, even tho he was warned that it was a losing cause.

Key Committee Role

Now that Presidential brinksmanship has spurred Congress to reassert its war making powers, it is imperative that key committees, such as Foreign Relations and Armed Services, have dependable intelligence on which to act. No time should be lost in passing the Cooper bill to bring this about.

This legislation, introduced by Sen. John Sherman Cooper [R., Ky.], would require the CIA to share its reports "fully and currently" with the appropriate committees on Capitol Hill. "I contend," says Cooper, "that the Congress, which must make decisions upon foreign policy and national security and which is called upon to commit material and human resources of the nation, should have access to all available information and intelligence to discharge properly and morally its responsibility to our government and its people."

The CIA briefings Congress gets now are limited to what the administration wants it to know. There is a so-called "watchdog committee" [a small informal group of senators and congressmen] that is supposed to keep an eye on the CIA, but it didn't hold a single meeting all last year. It will be said that Congress can't be trusted for sensitive information. Well, the greatest secrets of all, involving nuclear development, were shared with the Joint Atomic Energy Committee of Congress, and there has never been a leak in 25 years.

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Yes, Generals Can Be Fired

Columnist William F. Buckley Jr. raises a question on page 5 today that has puzzled less conservative writers for years: Why does the White House continue to act in Southeast Asia on the advice of generals who have been consistently wrong?

Gen. William C. Westmoreland, the commander of American forces in Indochina during the big buildup of the Johnson years, literally led the President down the garden path, insisting time after time that with just a few more thousand troops he could bring the situation quickly under control. He got the troops until Secretary of Defense Robert F. McNamara discovered that Westmoreland's optimism was unfounded. Did any dishonor then fall upon the general? Indeed not. He was promoted to the Joint Chiefs of Staff where he continues to advise the President.

Westmoreland was succeeded in Saigon by Gen. Creighton Abrams, whose assessments have been equally faulty. Abrams assured the White House last week that Vietnamization was working well and that the current North Vietnamese offensive was bound to fail. Vietnamization evidently has not worked, as Buckley points out, and at this writing the North Vietnamese are still on the offensive.

What about the CIA? Buckley asks. Well, according to the Pentagon Papers, the reports of the Central

Intelligence Agency during the Johnson administration tended to be fairly accurate and frequently ran counter to the optimistic reports of the general staff in Saigon. Yet the record shows that the reports of the CIA were disregarded in favor of the more palatable assessments of the generals.

In short, the White House has been acting on the advice it wished to hear and which the generals have been happy to provide. It obviously wouldn't do now for the White House to downgrade the sources of information which formed the basis of the war policies of two administrations—particularly while the present occupant is imploring the American people to stand by him in the conduct of a continuing war in Southeast Asia.

In order to defend his present policy, President Nixon must defend the premises on which it rests, including the premise inspired by Westmoreland and Abrams that victory will be ours if we will persevere just a little longer.

Columnist Buckley needs to be reminded that generals *can* be fired by a president with nerve and decision. President Truman relieved Gen. Douglas MacArthur of his command in Korea because MacArthur threatened to let that war get out of control. It is surprising that Buckley doesn't remember that, since he has condemned President Truman many times for doing it.—L.H.